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THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

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THREE GENERATIONS OF JAYS



No. 1

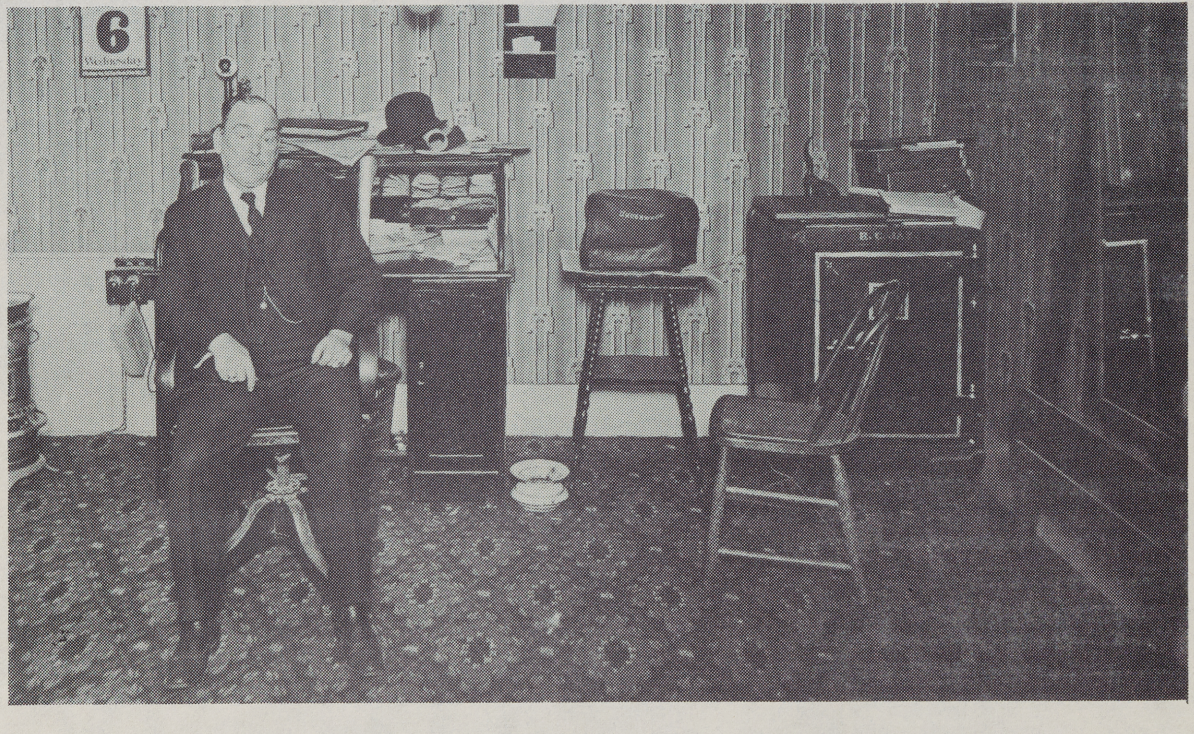
This is a story about another family closely associated with Madera and Madera County since 1890.

One of our best sources of information on the first Mr. Jay in Madera is found in "History and Biography of the State of California, San Joaquin Valley" by Prof. J. M. Gwin - 1905. After consulting with present members of the family, third generation, we corrected some errors found in the 1905 publication and present the first part of our story from the above source.

RICHARD CURTIS JAY

Before William the Conqueror had brought his victorious armies to England, the Jay family lived and flourished in the land of Normandy, France. Early in the history of America some of that name crossed the ocean from England and identified themselves with the patriots in the colonies. The most distinguished representative of that era was John Jay, the first chief justice of the United States. Another of the family, Charles Jay, served in the continental army during the Revolutionary war, having come to this country a short time before the outbreak of the struggle. This Revolutionary soldier had a brother, Stephen, who remained in England and engaged in farming there throughout all of his life. Richard Jay, a son of Stephen, was born at St. Blazey, England, and in 1859 came to the United States, settling on a farm near Honesdale, Wayne county, Pa., and afterward removing to Jermyn, Lackawanna county, where he died. Before leaving England he married Mary Curtis, whose father, William Curtis, was a farmer in England. Her death occurred in Jermyn, Pa. In her family there were four children who attained mature years, namely: Joseph, who died at Jermyn; Thomas, who engaged in mining and lived at Butte, Mont.; Rev. Stephen Jay, D. D., a pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Fortyfort, Luzerne county, Pa.; and Richard Curtis, the only representative of the family to come to California.

The last named child, Richard Curtis, was born at St. Blazey, England, March 1, 1853, and at six years of age accompanied the family to Pennsylvania, where his education was obtained in the Honesdale common schools. While attending school in the winter, after the age of fifteen he clerked in a mercantile store during the summer months. Going to Jermyn, Pa., in 1869, Mr. Jay secured employment as clerk in the general store of John Jermyn, with whom he remained much of the time for twelve years. Meanwhile he had gained a local reputation as a musician. From boyhood he had been fond of music and readily acquired a thorough knowledge of various instruments. In addition to clerking, he taught music and founded the Jermyn band, of which he was the leader. Under his skillful training the band won the medal for the district. (Note in the family picture he is wearing this medal.)



No. 2

On coming to California in 1877 he was engaged as a musician in San Jose. Next he went to Virginia City, Nev., and later taught the band of Eureka, same state, for two years. In 1881 he returned to Jermyn, Pa., and the following year became the teacher of the band at Nanticoke, that state, and was proprietor of a music store there. In 1890, he again came to California and settled in Madera and embarked in the furniture business. In September, 1893, he added an undertaking business in connection with his other work, and in 1901 converted the establishment into exclusively undertaking and picture framing. During the existence of the Madera Concert Band he was its leader.

The marriage of Mr. Jay, in Moosic, Pa., united him with Anna E. Swisher, who was born in Susquehanna county, that state. They owned and occupied a residence in the Hughes addition to Madera. Mrs. Jay was a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the family attended services there. Mr. Jay was an active member of the Madera Board of Trade, a believer in Republican principles, and a progressive citizen, contributing generously to worthy movements.

In 1898 the Republicans nominated him county coroner and public administrator. He was elected by a majority of four hundred, taking the oath of office in January, 1899, for a term of four years. So satisfactory was his service that in 1902 he was re-elected by a majority of one thousand and thirty, his second term that expired in January, 1907. The duties of his office and the conduct of his business made him a very busy man, but he found leisure to participate in the activities of the Ancient Order of United Woodmen, in which he was past master; and also in the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, in which he was noble grand two terms. He was also a member of the Masonic Lodge.

To prepare himself for satisfactory and efficient work in embalming, he took a course of study in the Champion College at Springfield, Ohio, and later enjoyed the advantage of a practical and thorough course in the New York Training School of Embalming, by means of which he became fully qualified for the important task of embalming.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Curtis Jay were the parents of four children: Robert Seldon Jay, Mattie, Stephen, Mary, and Ella Jane, daughter of Mr. Jay by his first marriage. Ella's mother, Kate Griffith, died in childbirth.

Richard Curtis Jay was active in many community affairs, especially anything involving music. Mr. Jay organized and directed the Madera Concert Band. In reviewing early Madera County newspapers, the Band is mentioned. It was a very popular band and won many "first" awards in parades and contests. A July 4th Parade in Madera in 1909 is mentioned in the Madera Weekly Tribune. "One of the attractions of the day was the Madera Concert Band - the members dressed in elaborate costumes." The paper further states that later the Opera House was filled to the doors to hear the patriotic program. "The Madera Concert Band's Overture was the first number and added much to the success of the day. There was lots of music - at the parade, at the literary exercises, during the sports and at the afternoon and evening concerts. Our town has good reason to be proud of her excellent musical organizations."

The photograph of the Madera Concert Band included herein was taken in 1908 on the steps of the Madera County Court House. Mr. Jay stands on the first step, cornet under his arm. Robert Seldon Jay stands in the back row with trombone. Since many of the members of this band will have meaning to our readers, we are listing their names:
R. C. Jay, C. R. Leland, Chester Enos, George Ladd, E. Gottenberg - cornets.
George Kohler, Chester Ellis, Dan Sunia, Will Dorn, Wilbur Leggett - clarinets.
Emmett Wren - saxaphone.
R. L. Bennett, W. F. Gray, R. Bennett, J. M. Ellis - altos.
J. H. Plate, R. D. Marshall, L. Wright - tenors.
R. S. Jay, Howard Clark - trombone.
George Bernhard - baritone.
H. Parkes, L. H. Service - tubas.
A. J. Duncan, H. P. Gordon - drums.



No. 3



No. 6

The present Jay family has the baton (ivory and ebony, inlaid with pearl) used by Mr. Jay all through his musical career both here and in Pennsylvania. Mrs. Jay, nee Anna E. Swisher, was also a musician; a pianist and singer.

Mr. Jay was frequently asked why he changed from a music store and furniture business to undertaking. Mr. Jay's son and successor, Robert Seldon Jay, gave this reason: "My father was forced into business because Madera's one and only undertaker in 1893 refused to bury a woman because she had no money." Fresno undertakers encouraged Mr. Jay and so he added undertaking to his furniture store. Through study and by attending schools, Mr. Jay became known as a first class undertaker.

The first place of business was located in a part of the old "Yosemite Hotel" on North E Street; about where the Madera Bowl is now situated. He moved from there to several places on Yosemite Avenue. In 1924 the business was moved to the corner of South C and Sixth Streets. The business remained there until 1961, when it was moved to the present location on Roberts Avenue.

Richard Curtis Jay and family resided at 220 South J Street. Mr. Jay died on December 6th, 1916, at the age of 63. He was a member of the Eagles, Ancient Order of Woodmen of the World, Odd Fellows, and the Episcopal Church of England. His wife Anna survived him, living until she was 93.

Greta Moncher, granddaughter of Mattie Jay Eddleman, sent us a copy of a page from the Madera Weekly Tribune, 1909, containing a story of Mattie Jay's wedding. The description of the wedding was interesting for several reasons, but of particular interest was the statement, "Loving hands had decorated the rooms, the brilliant electric lights adding much to the general appearance."

Mr. Jay's son, Robert Seldon Jay, worked with his father as soon as he was old enough, and so was prepared to carry on the business in 1916. Robert bought the business from his mother in 1921. He continued to handle the county work as coroner and county administrator - in fact, Robert S. held this office for over 40 years. He was generally known as "Bob" Jay. He attended the School of Embalming in San Francisco and became a licensed mortician.

A member of the Madera County Historical Society, Mrs. Bea Fuller Baumback, says she remembers the first Mr. Jay and his kindness at the time of the death of a brother when they came to Madera; then again another death in the family and the kindness and help of the second Mr. Jay. Through three generations this firm has represented kindness and understanding to people in time of bereavement and trouble.

Robert Seldon Jay was born in Pennsylvania in 1885 and lived all of his life in Madera. In 1917 he married Georgiana Woolsey of Ione, California. They were both interested in music. Robert played in the Madera Concert Band under his father's direction and was an ardent member until it disorganized in 1941. Robert played the organ for his own amusement, but played the trombone in the band. He also was a member of the Fresno Sciot's Band of Teheran Temple, an outstanding band throughout the valley. Remember the Raisin Day Parades?

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Seldon Jay had three children: Robert Charles and Roberta (twins) and Dorothy Ann. More about these children will be given later in the story.

Mr. Jay maintained a summer home at Central Camp. He liked to go up to his summer home, and put in many hours chopping and sawing wood. He was an expert marksman and enjoyed target shooting. His son and family still maintain the summer home.

Robert Seldon Jay continued in the funeral business until July 1, 1947, when his son Robert Charles officially took over the management of this pioneer establishment. Robert Seldon continued as county administrator and coroner and maintained his office at the mortuary. He held this office until late in 1954. Robert Seldon Jay passed away December 3, 1965, at the age of 80. He lived 75 years of his life in Madera. Mrs. Jay passed away in 1955.



No. 4

When Robert Charles, son of Robert Seldon Jay, took over the management of the business he was well prepared, having worked with his father. He graduated from Fresno State College and graduated from the San Francisco School of Morticians in 1939. He served as deputy coroner under his father for 10 years and was elected as county administrator and coroner in 1954, and held the office for $2\frac{1}{2}$ terms, when he resigned and the office was combined with the Sheriff's Office.

At one time, some of the Jay family lived within the same block. Richard Curtis Jay lived at 220 South "J" and Robert Seldon Jay at 225 South "J", and Robert Charles Jay was born there. Both houses are still standing and are occupied.

Robert Charles served in the Air Service Command Transport Group in England during World War II, entering in 1941. He was awarded the Bronze Service Star for outstanding work in hauling cargo and evacuating wounded after "D Day" and during the battles of Normandy and Northern France.

Robert Charles Jay married Priscilla Charlton in 1946. They have three children: Virginia Elizabeth Burke, Robert Charles, Jr., and Terry Steven. Robert Charles, Jr. indicates a deep interest in carrying on the Jay tradition, so there may be a fourth generation to continue the R. C. Jay business title. This family resides at 150 North Park Drive.



No. 5

We share the story of this family because the name has been a part of Madera County since 1890, when Richard Curtis Jay brought his family to Madera.

We present a partial family tree so that our readers may keep the names in chronological order and for historical reference:

Richard Curtis Jay - first wife - Kate Griffith
Daughter - Ella Jane Jay Tuggle Bachelor - no children

second wife - Anna E. Swisher
Children: Robert Seldon
Mattie
Mary
Stephen

Robert Seldon Jay - wife - Georgiana Woolsey
Children: Robert Charles and Roberta (twins)
Dorothy Ann

Mattie Jay - husband - Chester A. Eddleman
Children: Jay
Ida
Ada

Mary Jay - husband - Clarence Ballard
Son - John Richard

Stephen

At the time of this publication, there are seven great grandchildren and five great, great grandchildren of Richard Curtis Jay.

Data related to photographs in this issue:

No. 1 - Ella Jane Jay, daughter; Richard Curtis Jay; son Robert Seldon; Mattie, daughter; and wife Anna Swisher Jay.

No. 2 - Richard Curtis Jay seated in his office. Safe is still in present business building. Note the items that were related to his county administrator and coroner duties.

No. 3 - R. C. Jay home on 220 South J St., Madera, Calif. This was taken in 1911. This house is now owned and occupied by Mr. & Mrs. Stanley Jessing and family.

No. 4 - Madera Concert Band taken in 1908. Band members are listed elsewhere in the story.

No. 5 - Early day hearse - R. C. Jay and driver C. Curtin, father of the late Will R. Curtin (presented to M.C.H.S. by Marietta Curtin Gross)

No.6 - Robert Seldon Jay, in front of Central Camp Cabin,1958.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS HISTORIAN

Mr. & Mrs. Robert C. Jay loaned photos and gave historical data. Much information came from early Madera Tribunes, diaries and scrapbooks.

MEETINGS

Last membership meeting for 1971 will be held December 12th at Veteran's Memorial Hall in Madera at 2 P. M.

The annual meeting will be held in January, 1972. At this time, new officers will be elected and reports of all committees will be given.

ANTIQUE SALE HELD JUNE 5 & 6, 1971

$935.90 was realized after all expenses were paid. This amount will be added to our Museum Fund, making a total of $5563.65 at this publication.

PICTURES RECEIVED

Mrs. A. D. Seguin of Dublin, California, sent in a nice collection of photographs, but no identification - no doubt all related to the Ritter, McCabe and Winkleman families of early Madera County. Mrs. Seguin is also sending a trunk and contents - the property of Francis M. Ritter and America Bell Winkleman Ault Ritter, her great grandparents. The trunk was the property of Jim Ritter of North Fork, who died in 1967.

If anyone desires information on the above family names, you may write to Mrs. A. D. Seguin, 8248 Elgin Lane, Dublin, Calif., 94566.

GIFTS RECENTLY PRESENTED TO M.C.H.S.

1. Madera Weekly Tribunes for 1909 and 1910 - two years of early Madera County history.

2. Two large boxes of early Madera County history - memorabilia from many areas, including many photographs - all of this is from the Madera County Library.

The Madera County Court House, erected in 1900, was placed in the National Register of Historic Places on Sept. 3, 1971.

A group of members from the M.C.H.S. are now examining all possible ways that we might secure funds to restore the Court House, so that we may establish the museum we have talked about for some time.

EXHIBIT

Mr. J. Frank Martin of Bass Lake has arranged a very interesting display of early American and European spinning wheels at the Madera County Government Center. This exhibit is well worth your taking time to visit. It will be available until January 7, 1972.

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x DUES ARE DUE x
x FOR 1972!! x
x MAIL TO P. O. BOX 478, MADERA, CALIF. x
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x Start the New Year right x
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